

UCLA

California Policy Options

Title

Introduction

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/87478483>

Author

Mitchell, Daniel J.B.

Publication Date

1999-01-01

Introduction

California continued its economic boom during 1998, along with the rest of the U.S. Some dark clouds appeared on the horizon, notably the Asian financial crisis and volatility in the U.S. stock market. And evidence appeared of a slowdown in employment growth of the entertainment sector, a mainstay of the state's economy. Still, the UCLA Anderson Forecast is not projecting an economic downturn for the state or the nation.

California voters were also not in a pessimistic mood. But although not gloomy about California's economic prospects, the state's voters seemed to feel it was time for a change in Sacramento. In November 1998, they elected the first Democratic governor since Jerry Brown left office in the early 1980s. Along with such political change comes heightened attention to public policy.

In our third annual volume of California Policy Options, we review the economic and political trends in the state in chapters by Tom Lieser and Xandra Kayden, respectively. We then turn to several key issues for California. Most of our review this year touches on the human side of public policy. But we also consider an important area of physical infrastructure.

With efforts to promote the transition from welfare to work underway, we examine barriers to finding work caused by locational mismatches between jobs and people. Where such mismatches occur, transportation access is an important factor in success in finding a job, as Paul Ong and Evelyn Blumenberg point out in their chapter on such mismatches. But there are other determinants as well.

Education is an important element in success in the job market. In his chapter, Theodore Mitchell points to efforts to reform K-12 education. Many Californians believe educational reform in the abstract is needed, but determining what those reforms should be has not been easy. Clearly, educational reform will require significant attention by the incoming governor. But even if ideal reforms are achieved - whatever those may be - there can still be external influences on labor market outcomes. In particular, international trade is often cited as such an influence. Raul Hinojosa Ojeda and Fernando De Paolis examine the impact of trade on the California workforce in their chapter.

California, with its growing racial and ethnic diversity, is often seen as a forerunner of changes in demographics in the rest of the U.S. Its reactions to diversity are seen as indicators of the state of race and inter-group relations to come. One of the more striking developments in this regard was a decision - first by the Regents of the University of California and then by the

electorate - to end “affirmative action” programs in student admissions. Cecilia Conrad examines the impact of that decision on the University. And while many seem to believe that race and inter-group relations have worsened in California - thanks to the various “wedge” issues that have been on the state’s ballot, Daniel Mitchell reminds us that in historical perspective such relations are much improved.

If there is one characteristic of California that has not changed over time, it is the ongoing controversy over water policy. California has long been famous, not least because of the film *Chinatown*, for its battles over water. Indeed, as Harold Brackman and Steven Erie note in their chapter, the fight over Owens Valley water - commemorated (although misplaced in time) in that film - continues until today. And the Owens Valley is only one battlefield in California’s ongoing water wars, Brackman and Erie report:

In cooperation with the School of Public Policy and Social Research, the UCLA Anderson Business Forecast continues to make California Policy Options available to Forecast subscribers, California policy makers, university students, and others interested in the major issues facing the state. We plan to continue these volumes as a contribution to an informed policy dialogue.

Daniel J.B. Mitchell
Co-Director
UCLA Anderson Business Forecast
Ho-su Wu Professor
Anderson Graduate School of Management
and
School of Public Policy and Social Research